

From: Louis A. Hoyer, G/275- 5825 Horton, Mission,
Kansas- 66202 8/85

TOM S. HIGLEY
THE 70th INF. DIV. ASSOCIATION

2nd Platoon, Company C
275th Infantry Regiment
Villa Venice, Apt. 915-D
915 North Desert
Tucson, Arizona 85711

7TH ARMY IN GERMAN OFFENSIVE

(The following account of the actions of the United States Seventh Army, under command of Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch, jr., USA, during the period 15 Dec. to 25 Jan., was prepared at Seventh Army headquarters at the request of the ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL.)

An account of Seventh Army's successful repulse of an offensive by the German Army Group G and Army Group Upper Rhine during the first three weeks of January would not be seen in proper light unless considered in relation to the major German offensive against the First U.S. Army which began in the Eifel sector on 16 December—one day after Seventh Army troops crossed the German border. A second factor which cannot be ignored in Seventh Army's success is the fact that a mighty Russian offensive began on 12 January and assumed ever increasing proportions.

On 15 December, Seventh Army troops pushed into Germany around Bobenthal. They had secured Strasbourg and faced Northeast, leaving the Colmar Pocket to be cleaned up by the First French Army. The Seventh Army at that time consisted of six Infantry and two Armored Divisions operating under VI and XV Corps. The VI Corps was on the right, with its flank on the Rhine, and had under its command the 3d, 45th, 79th and 103d Inf. Divs. and the 14th Armored Div. On the left, XV Corps had the 44th and 100th Inf. Divs., the 12th Armored Div. and the 106th Cavalry Group. The Army front was 47 miles in width, VI Corps having a 31-mile frontage and XV Corps a 16-mile frontage. The Army right flank extended along the Rhine for 36 miles and was guarded by the elements of newly arrived Infantry regiments who were to complete training in the Rhine Valley prior to employment in combat.

The most significant terrain feature in the Army sector was the rugged Lower Vosges Mountains which bisected the Army sector roughly parallel to the axis of advance and roughly corresponding to the boundary between the two Corps. On the East was the Alsace Plain and on the West was the gently rolling Saar River Valley. It was only in the Vosges sector, around Bitche, that the Maginot Line had not been reduced.

Having failed in three weeks of determined effort to penetrate Seventh Army's positions, the enemy made no further serious offensive thrust. The spotlight shifted to the American-French operations to drive the Germans from the Colmar Pocket. The Ardennes offensive had failed, and the Russian drive toward Berlin was drawing first-class enemy troops from the Western front.

To what extent outside influences were responsible for Seventh Army's defensive success will perhaps never be known. There can be no doubt,

QC #1

in any event, that the Germans attempted a major offensive and that they failed to break through. Excellent G-2 work pointed each new thrust in time for intelligent shifts of reserves, and the American infantryman held his ground.

G-2 Picture.

When the failure of the enemy to hold the Saverne Gap position North and South of Phalsbourg had resulted in the capture of Strasbourg and the split between the 19th and 1st German Armies, the 19th Army continued to offer strong resistance to efforts to drive it from the Vosges. As the Seventh Army turned Northeast, the 361st and 553d Divs. had been virtually destroyed as a force capable of protecting the Siegfried Line approaches to Karlsruhe. The enemy quickly remedied this deficiency, however, by successively screening with elements of the 11th Panzer, 25th Panzer Grenadier and 130th Panzer Divs. until the 256th and 245th Divs. arrived from Holland in early December.

The Seventh Army pressed steadily Northeast towards the Siegfried Line while the German 1st Army attempted to withdraw with minimum expense to Siegfried positions. This was in contrast to the German's determined and aggressive effort to maintain his bridgehead in Alsace against forces of the First French Army seeking to close the Colmar Pocket. PW's from all the divisions facing Seventh U. S. Army mentioned that their divisions were to withdraw to the West Wall by about 16 December. One exception was that Bitche, a strong link in the Maginot chain, was to be held to the last man. PW's told of very strong enemy disciplinary measures, including orders to platoon leaders to shoot any man wanting to surrender. Some PW's talked of orders from the Fuhrer Hauptquarter to the effect „In the West Wall you shall fight and die.”

The major event affecting enemy forces facing Seventh U. S. Army during the period from 19 December to 25 December was the relief of elements of the 11th Panzer Div. by the 257th Volksgrenadier Div. in the area West of Bitche on 19 December. Since the German offensive at Eifel had begun 16 December, it was suspected for a while that elements of 11th Panzer Div. had been hurriedly transferred Northward in order to participate in the all-out effort in the First U. S. Army sector. The possibility that Army Group G might be stripped of all its mobile units was considered. 21st Panzer Div. had not been satisfactorily identified since 19 December, and it was believed that the bulk of the division was refitted as Army Group G Reserve. 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div. was apparently getting new tanks or assault guns. Obviously, these refitted mobile elements might either go North or be available to German First Army in reserve for offensive operations in the future.

Left Flank Extended

By 18 December, it had become apparent that the German offensive against Twelfth Army Group was of major proportions. Seventh Army received orders to extend its left boundary to St. Avold in order to allow Third Army to regroup for operations against the Ardennes salient, and was assigned a defensive mission.

The extension of Seventh Army's left flank was rapidly put into execution. On 19 December, Third Army's XII Corps had assumed control of the III Corps' front and III Corps had begun its movement to the North. On 21 December, XII Corps had passed control of its area to Seventh Army's XV Corps and begun its movement to Luxembourg.

XV Corps identified 17th SS Panzer Grenadier and 347th Inf. Divs. in its widened sector.

All Third Army units had been released by 26 December and the Seventh Army occupied a 84-mile front from the Rhine to a point a few miles West of Saarbrücken. VI Corps, under command of Maj. General E. H. Brooks, held a line from the Rhine River to Bitche with the 79th and 45th Inf. Divs. in the line and the 14th Armored Div. in reserve. On the Corps' left flank, holding a frontage of about 10 miles in the Lower Vosges-Hardt area was Task Force Hudelson. This task force had been constituted by VI Corps on 21 December and consisted of CC „R” 14th Armored Div. (less one tank battalion); Company „B”, 645th TD Bn; Company „B”, 3d Chemical Mortar Bn; and the 117th Cavalry Rcn. Squadron. XV Corps, commanded by Maj. General W. H. Haislip, had the 100th, 44th and 103d Inf. Divs. in the line, the 106th Cavalry Regiment on the left flank. The 12th Armored Div. was at Fénétrange. The 36th Inf. Div. was in Army Reserve Southwest of Phalsbourg.

The greater part of the Rhine flank, extending for about 40 miles, was a responsibility of Task Force Harris and Task Force Linden under Army control. These task forces were composed of infantry elements of the 63d and 42d Inf. Divs., respectively, whose supporting troops had not yet arrived in the Army area.

Change To Defensive

The change from offensive to defensive action came to Seventh Army officially in the form of a Sixth Army Group Letter of Instructions, dated 21 December 1944, which emphasized that, subject to securing essential lines of communication, Sixth Army Group would be prepared to yield ground rather than to endanger the integrity of its forces.

Despite all security precautions, the rearward movement of supplies and troops could hardly fail to be obvious even to civilian observers. The Seventh Army G-4 had to whittle down forward supply dumps to a minimum. Within seven days after 29 December, 8,000 to 9,000 tons of ammunition alone had been moved from dumps East of the Vosges to safer locations in the rear. In the same period, 8,000 tons of ammunition were hauled rearward from a forward dump in the XV Corps sector. This does not include a multitude of local moves which had to be effected from forward dumps which were practically under enemy mortar fire. On the other hand, Ordnance and Engineer personnel had to work feverishly transporting anti-tank and antipersonnel mines, barbed wire, pickets, demolitions, concertina wire forward into the combat areas.

In the period from 24 December to 31 December, Seventh Army had only limited physical contact with enemy units opposing it, but there was apparent a continued effort on the part of the enemy to refit and reorganize his divisions in preparation for an offensive action. In the XV Corps sector, the 36th Volksgrenadier Div. had been pulled out of the line and was refitting. Elements of 19th Volksgrenadier Div. appeared in the sector of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div., confirming the idea that the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div. was leaving only a shell in contact. 559th Div., which had been employed on the Southern flank of the Third U. S. Army had not been satisfactorily identified since 19 December and was believed to be refitting. 25th Panzer Grenadier Div. appeared to have only a few scattered elements mounting the Siegfried positions, while the bulk of the unit refitted in the Zweibrücken area. It became known that the most important mobile unit of the German First Army, the 21st Panzer

Div., had not gone North but was still in the VI U. S. Corps sector. Like 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div., it also had only a shell in the line.

G-2's Estimate

The offensive capabilities of the enemy on Seventh Army's front were strongly pointed out in Seventh Army G-2 estimate of the enemy strength, published 29 December. While admitting the enemy's over-all attitude had been defensive up to that time, the document reported definite enemy buildup in two areas which might effect Seventh Army: (1) In the East Rhine Valley and the Colmar bridgehead; (2) In the Saarbrücken area.

The G-2 estimate stated that there were elements of nine divisions of the German First Army in contact with ours of the Seventh U. S. Army West of the Rhine. It was emphasized that contact with the German First Army mobile units, i.e., the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier, 25th Panzer Grenadier, and 21st Panzer Divs., was very light.

In addition to the enemy's obvious refitting operations, the G-2 estimate considered the fact that both the terrain and weather favored the enemy in an attack. Three major features contributed to the terrain advantage: (1) The Rhine River formed a continuous right flank for Seventh Army half as long as the front itself; (2) The Lower Vosges and Hardt Mountains formed a barrier to lateral communication, not only providing the enemy with a natural defensive position, but offering him a temporarily secure flank for a counterattack in force if he could hold the mountain passes; (3) The Sarr River flowing north about 10 miles west of and parallel to the Lower Vosges, offered a natural corridor.

Weather favored the enemy because it was very poor. Fog, rain, and limited visibility might be expected to reduce the effectiveness of our air support. As it turned out, there were only three days of good flying weather between 1 January and 25 January.

Enemy Capabilities

Taking all these things into consideration, the G-2 estimate listed the following capabilities: (1) To attack South from Bitche-Sarregue-Mines with 5-8 divisions, initial objective seizing Saverne and Ingwiller Passes. The objective of this attack would be to clear the Rhine Valley, capture or destroy the bulk of the Seventh Army, and indirectly to relieve pressure of the Third U. S. Army against German forces in the Eifel area. It was expected that this attack would probably be coordinated with a drive northward by the 19th Army from the Colmar bridgehead. Effect establishment of a bridgehead in the Gamsheim area—North of Strasbourg. These operations would, if successful, isolate Strasbourg, cutting the communications of all units in line, and complete the encirclement of Seventh Army forces East of the Hardt Mountains. (2) With forces currently in contact, and in immediate reserve, launch a series of limited objective attacks. The purpose of these attacks would be to keep Seventh Army units under sufficient pressure to prevent dispatching of troops to the Eifel area.

Since the most logical and economical employment of forces then in contact and known to be in reserve, would be in limited objective attacks, designed to contain Seventh Army units in present position, capability number 2 was favored over number 1. However, the indications of enemy buildups in the Saarbrücken area, in the East Rhine Valley, together with the 19th German Army's determination to hold the Colmar bridgehead, could not be ignored.

Also, the tremendous morale factor involved for the Germans in a successful recapture of Alsace had to be considered. This would be all the more true if the attack in the Eifel area failed to achieve any substantial success.

SHAEF Earmarks Reserves

On the same day that the Advance CP of Sixth Army Group closed at Phalsbourg and withdrew to Vittel, 27 December, Seventh Army's newly arrived XXI Corps was given control of the 36th Inf. Div. and the 12th Armored Div. and told to assemble in the Phalsbourg—Sarrebouurg area as SHAEF Reserve. The Corps Commander, Maj. Gen. F. W. Milbourn, received orders to be prepared to move on short notice to an area to be designated by higher headquarters.

These things were done in accordance with verbal instructions from the Commanding General, Sixth Army Group, confirmed by a Sixth Army Group Letter of Instructions, dated 28 December 1944, which laid down successive withdrawal positions and specified that the main defense line would follow the Eastern slopes of the Vosges. In addition to Letter of Instructions which stated that a reserve of not less than one RCT and one Armored Combat Command would be held mobile in Sarrebouurg prepared to move on six hours' notice on the authority of the Army Group Commander only, Seventh Army was to be prepared to receive the 2nd French Armored Div., then in contact below Strasbourg, upon relief from present mission by First French Army.

A Combat Command of the 14th Armored Division was moved West to Phalsbourg. In the VI Corps sector, Task Force Herren, composed of newly arrived infantry elements of the 70th U. S. Inf. Div., was directed to relieve Task Force Harris along the Rhine and to prepare a MLR on the Maginot Line in zone. Task Force Harris was directed to assemble as VI Corps Reserve. XV Corps CP withdrew to Fenetrange.

Bitche Sector Watched

On 30 December, as the 2nd French Armored Div. began its movement into the XV Corps sector, the following radio was received from Sixth Army Group:

"It is possible that hostile attack against your flank West of Bitche may force you to give ground from your main position. To meet such a possibility, it is necessary that our West Flank be protected by a reserve battle position. With this in mind, reconnaissance and organization of a reserve battle position will be instituted without delay along high ground on the general line: Hill East of Kandroff-Benestroff-Sarre Union - Ingwiller. One half of each division and attached troops currently earmarked as SHAEF Reserve located in your area, may be employed at any given period of time to assist in organization of ground provided troops so employed can be reassembled and prepared for movement on 6 hours' notice. Maintain liaison with Third Army in this connection."

Having received a qualified permission to use the SHAEF Reserve troops, the Commanding General, Seventh Army, on 31 December detached the 36th Inf. Div. and 12th Armored Div. from XXI Corps and placed them in Army Reserve. The two divisions and XV Corps received a directive providing that a reserve battle position would be reconnoitered and organized along the high ground on the general line—Hill East of Kandroff-Benestroff-Sarre Union-Lorentzen. This line ran East-West some 12 miles South of forward positions. XV Corps also moved two

regiments from Task Force Harris into position to bolster the 100th and 44th Inf. Divs.

As further insurance against a Saar Valley penetration, VI Corps directed the 14th Armored Div., then in Corps Reserve, to be prepared to move to the vicinity of Phalsbourg on Corps Order as a counter-attacking force in event of an enemy breakthrough in the XV Corps sector. The 275th Inf. Regt. of Task Force Herren began movement to Niederbronn for attachment to the 45th Inf. Div.

On New Year's Eve, the Army Commander went to XV Corps CP at Fenetrange. There he informed both XV and VI Corps Commanders that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year's Day. Insofar as was possible, Seventh Army had made itself ready.

The Attack Begins

Before the new year was more than a few minutes old, the Germans in fact launched their offensive against Seventh Army along the general line Neunhollen-Bannstein-Bitche-Sarreguemines. They attacked with six divisions, identified from East to West as 256th Volksgrenadier, 361st Volksgrenadier, 559th Volksgrenadier, 17th SS Panzer Grenadier, 36th and 19th Volksgrenadier Divs. The code name of the offensive, so called in commemoration of Hitler's entry into France, was "10 May 1940." Spearheading the attack was the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div. "Goetz von Berlichingen," up to strength and newly fitted. The division's mission was to break through to Rohrbach, on the western slopes of the Hardt, and thus secure an opening through which the 21st Panzer Div. could debouch into the Saar Valley. 21st Panzer Div. was believed to be lurking at Zweibrücken.

Troops of Task Force Hudelson took the brunt of an enemy drive which penetrated to Bannstein before daylight. Pressure continued during the day, and an aerial observer reported an estimated enemy regiment moving Southwest toward Bannstein during the afternoon. Armored infantry was sent to the Baerenthal area to reinforce the VI Corps left flank, and the 14th Armored Div. was given the mission of blocking the passes at Niederbronn, Neuwiller, Ingwiller, Rothbach, and Zingwiller. Elements of 79th Inf. Div. were rushed to the threatened flank.

West from the Hardt Mountains to the Saar River the enemy pressed against the XV Corps line. The 106th Cavalry Group repulsed five counterattacks and the 44th Inf. Div. inflicted bloody losses in thwarting enemy's attempts to cross the Blies River.

The admirable defense put up by the 44th and 100th U. S. Inf. Divs. inflicted extremely heavy casualties on the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div., 36th and 19th Volksgrenadier Divs.—forcing the enemy to change his plans. It was reported by some of the 44th Inf. Div. defenders that enemy troops attacked standing up, singing and shouting as if intoxicated.

During the day, the Commanding General, Seventh Army, received permission from Sixth Army Group to commit the 36th Inf. Div. or the 12th U. S. Armored Div., if necessary. It will be remembered that these units had been earmarked for Shaefer Reserve. As enemy pressure grew, it was directed that the 12th Armored Div. would establish a reconnaissance screen west of the Saar River and south of the Maginot Line; and that the 36th Inf. Div. would move one RCT at once to the Waldhambach area for attachment to the 100th Inf. Div. and the general mission of protecting the XV Corps right flank. The 2d French Armored Div. was

to be prepared to relieve the 14th Armored Div. and carry out its assigned mission.

When the first day of the New Year ended, Seventh Army troops had maintained essential positions against enemy attacks without serious loss of ground. Late in the day it was decided that the Army CP would be withdrawn to Luneville at once. All equipment and majority of personnel departed before midnight to the new CP west of the Vosges.

On 2 January, the Army Commander received a personal cable from the Commanding General, Sixth Army Group, expressing the concern of higher headquarters lest divisions in the Haguenau area be severely handled or cut off in the event of successful enemy penetration south toward Sarrebourg or north from the Colmar pocket. In summary, it was made plain that Seventh Army must accept the loss of Strasbourg and territory east of the Vosges rather than in any way impair its ability to:

- (a) Release to SHAEF as soon as possible one Armored and one Infantry Div. as SHAEF Reserve.
- (b) Reconstitute as soon as possible Seventh Army's own local Army Reserve and the prescribed Army Group Reserve west of the Vosges.
- (c) Preserve the integrity of Seventh Army units in advance of the main position.

Bitche Penetration

Unable to make much progress against XV Corps west of the Vosges, the Germans attempted to exploit their initial penetration achieved against the lightly-held left flank of VI Corps in the area Phillipsbourg-Bitche. The mountains were anything but ideal for armor, but elements of the 21st Panzer Div. were reported shifting over toward Bitche. Apparently the intention was to open up the mountain passes and possibly secure a springboard for armor in the Rothbach area.

VI Corps on 2 January reacted swiftly. The 45th Inf. Div., with two regiments of 79th Inf. Div. attached, threw its weight against the shoulder of the salient. Task Force Herren, also attached, occupied positions to block further infiltration. The maneuver made possible relief of Task Force Hudelson, which reverted to control of 14th Armored Div. in the vicinity of Bouxwiller. Troops in the apex of VI Corps advance into Germany, around Wissembourg, withdrew under orders to Maginot positions. On the right flank, Task Force Linden was attached to 79th Inf. Div.

Decision to Hold Strasbourg

The necessity for withdrawal from Strasbourg and the Alsatian Plain presented diplomatic as well as military problems. Numerous officials had been moved into this area by the French Government, and residents of the area had shown their loyalty to France in a manner which would bode them ill, should the Germans return. It was highly desirable, if not an actual moral responsibility, that these people be warned of Seventh Army's intentions in time to get out. On the other hand, to broadcast the Army's intentions to all and sundry was obviously unthinkable from a tactical point of view.

Brig. Gen. John S. Winn had been designated U. S. Military Representative in the Strasbourg area to insure continuity of policy and action so long as the area remained in Seventh Army's combat zone. The French

Military Governor at Strasbourg was General de Brigade Schwartz. These officers worked together in a highly efficient manner.

The French attitude toward the planned withdrawal from Strasbourg became apparent when a courier from General Schwartz's headquarters delivered a letter to the Seventh Army Commander's quarters at Lunéville early in the morning of 3 January. In this letter, General Schwartz stressed the reprisals which would be made on patriotic Alsations by returning Germans and implored the Army Commander not to go forward with the plan. Shortly thereafter a letter was received from General Winn, passing on General Schwartz's urgent plea that Seventh Army endeavor to hold Strasbourg and as much as possible of Alsatian Plain.

Fortunately, just as the matter was coming to a head, word came by telephone from higher headquarters about noon on 3 January that Strasbourg would be held. The Seventh Army Commander thereupon sent the following letter to General Schwartz:

"My dear General:

"I received your letter which was delivered to my Hq. by your aide on the night of 2-3 January.

"I understand fully your concern over the evacuation of your beloved Strasbourg, which was so dearly bought at the price of French and American blood. *** I am sure you will be relieved to learn that I have received permission from higher headquarters to defend Strasbourg with all the means at my command.

(s) A. M. PATCH,

Lieut. Gen., U. S. Army, Commanding.

After the decision to hold Strasbourg, Seventh Army received approval of a plan to hold the Maginot Line east of the Vosges and the Rhine south from its intersection with the Maginot Line. This was considered the logical line to hold because its siting was good, the ground was already fortified, and lines to the rear were on terrain of indifferent defensive value.

With Strasbourg and the Alsace Plain at issue, the Germans during 3 January and several days thereafter continued to beat their heads against XV Corps—where success would yield the richest prize. Meanwhile they kept strong pressure against the eastern shoulder of the Bitche salient, from Phillipsbourg to Wildenguth, and attempted to deepen their penetration by infiltration.

17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div., despite bloody losses inflicted by the 44th Inf. Div., aggressively pushed into Achen and Gros Rederching with armor. Both towns were retaken the same day by CC "L" of the 2d French Armored Div., which attacked north on XV Corps order. The remainder of the French division was closing in the vicinity of Drulingen after completion of its relier by First French Army south of Strasbourg. The 36th Inf. Div. was shifted to Montbronn.

Next day XV Corps acted forcibly to restore original positions of the 44th Inf. Div. The 2d Bn., 71st Inf. Regt., made unsuccessful attempts to relieve 2d French Armored Division elements in Gros Rederching. It was bloody fighting, but the Corps aggressive defense was whittling the enemy down to size. 36th Inf. Div. was told to be prepared to attack east against the Bitche salient on Corps Order.

It is an interesting commentary on the quality of German Military Intelligence that enemy division commanders opposite XV Corps did not

know that the 2d French Armored Div. was in the area until they had captured French PW's. An arrogant young division commander captured near Rimling on 6 January said that he had received only sketchy information from higher headquarters on the movement of Allied units. Moreover he apparently had no idea of the real scope of the German offensive. He was simply given day-to-day objectives, or so he said.

This lack of information was not due to lack of effort. Robbed of his aerial eyes by Allied air superiority, the Germans sent over numerous short-range agents whose machinations were effectively frustrated by Seventh Army counter-intelligence agencies. No less than 44 espionage and sabotage agents were arrested during the period 1 December 15 January.

Reducing Bitche Salient

The Bitche salient became increasingly troublesome. By 4 January elements of four German divisions—6 SS Mountain Div. "NORD," and 257th, 361st and 559th Volksgrenadier Divs.—were known to be in the area, with 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divs. not far away. Forward elements of the fresh 6th SS Mountain Div. infiltrated into Wingen, thus cutting the Ingwiller Pass road. This was the deepest penetration of the campaign.

VI Corps, which had withdrawn to Maginot positions in the Windstein-Brevenbach-Soufflenheim sector, was engaged in bitter fighting from Sarreinsburg to Dambach. Task Isorce Herren moved to eliminate the Germans at Wingen, and the penetration was quickly sealed off. By 7 January, the 45th Inf. Div. had mopped up Wingen and cleared the road to Lichtenberg. Enemy losses were heavy. Pressure around Bitche continued, but the identification of PW's from 21st Panzer Div. around Ingolsheim on 6 January had already pointed to a shift of armored weight east to the Wissembourg Gap.

Danger on Rhine Flank

On 6 January, the Germans began to probe seriously into Seventh Army's vulnerable, lightly held Rhine River flank which extended for some 26 miles above and below Strasbourg. An estimated battalion of enemy crossed to the general area Gambsheim-Olfendorf, and further small elements continued to cross during the day. This was the beginning of a troublesome infiltration which the Germans subsequently exploited to full extent and which, considering the heavy pressure on the Army front, Seventh Army was not in a position to wipe out.

Fortunately, the Rhine flank was shortened, so far as VI Corps was concerned, when First French Army's north boundary was shifted north along the river as far as Gambsheim. Elements of the 3d Algerian Infantry Div. had already begun relief of Task Force Linden in the Strasbourg area, by 5 January, but due to enemy action, the French were unable to assume control of the sector until 7 January at 1915A.

Although pressure was building up in the North, VI Corps 79th Inf. Div. began operations immediately to destroy the Gambsheim bridgehead. Units in the Maginot Line were relieved by Task Force Linden. The 232nd Inf. Regt. (Task Force Linden) cleared Kilsett and reached the woods north of Gambsheim. On 6 January Rohrwiller, Drusenheim, Sessenheim and Stalmatten were cleared. Next day operations made little progress against stiffening resistance. Tanks and selfpropelled guns had been ferried across.

If the Rhine situation had been the only problem confronting VI Corps, things would have been simple. But enemy armored pressure was developing steadily on the 79th Inf. Div. front from the direction of Wissembourg. The German was intent on keeping the initiative and, when push through the Vosges toward Rothbach did not meet success, he shifted 21st Panzer Div. 20 miles further east to Wissembourg Gap. Any break in this sector would undoubtedly attract the 25th Panzer Grenadier Div. To meet this threat, Combat Command "A" of the 14th Armored Div. was attached to 79th Inf. Div. and on 6 January began moving to an assembly area north of Haguenau.

Army Reserves Move East

With the Schwerpunkt of the German offensive apparently moving east, Seventh Army on 6 January detached the 12th Armored Div. from XV Corps and attached it to VI Corps. General Brooks, commanding VI Corps, received authority to move one normal combat command plus a tank destroyer battalion east of the Vosges, but the remainder of the division was not to be moved except on Army authority. CC "B" of the 12th Armored Div. began movement through the passes to Hochfelden.

Feeling that more armor was needed to deal with his situation, General Brooks at 1130A on 7 January telephoned Seventh Army Headquarters for authority to move the remainder of the 12th Armored Div. to Hochfelden. General Brooks was told to go ahead. Next day CC "B" began a series of operations against the Gamsheim cancer.

It was not only from the front and flank that VI Corps was threatened—but also from the rear. The German 19th Army had been building up its forces in the Colmar Pocket for a drive north on Strasbourg. It was reported that Heinrich Himmler had taken personal command of German forces in the Colmar Pocket, and that Strasbourg had been promised to Hitler by 30 January as a sort of gift in commemoration of the 12th Anniversary of his rise to power. On 7 January, First French Army's II Corps received a strong attack in the Neunkirch-Witternheim area, and withdrew to Rossfeld. The attack from the south was obviously being coordinated with that from the Gamsheim Pocket in the north. The enemy appeared to be bringing more armor into play.

Hatten-Rittershoffen Action

What transpired during the period 8-25 January can best be told chronologically. The bitter fighting which saved Strasbourg does not fit into a neat picture. To emphasize the Gamsheim action at the expense of that at Hatten would be distortion. Nor should it be forgotten that enemy threats from the Bitche salient and on the VI Corps front continued to be very real long after the Rhine flank claimed first priority.

As expected, the Germans drove viciously into the VI Corps Maginot position in the vicinity of Aschbach on 8 January. Shortly thereafter, 25th Panzer Grenadier Div. made its appearance in the Hatten area, apparently operating under command of 21st Panzer Div. In an attack called "Operation Feuchtinger" after the Commanding General of the 21st Panzer Div. It was apparent that the enemy was attempting a quick breakthrough to Haguenau, vital communication center, perhaps with the intention of effecting a junction there with enemy troops crossing the Rhine and with forces emerging from the Hardt Mountain salient.

Through January 20, when the VI Corps executed a planned withdrawal, the fighting in the Hatten-Rittershoffen area continued to be extremely fierce. Both 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divs. suffered heavy losses in armor and infantry. The enemy reinforced his troops in the Rittershoffen area on 13 January with elements of the 20th Parachute Regt., a recent arrival from Holland. The 10th SS Panzer Div. "Frunderberg" was reliably reported in the Kaiserlautern area. Meanwhile, considerable reshuffling of enemy units was on in the Hardt Forest area.

XXI Corps on Left

The Commanding General, Sixth Army Group, visited Seventh Army Headquarters on the morning of 8 January to confer on future operations. Originally, it had been intended that the newly arrived XXI Corps would be assigned the three new Infantry Divisions and would take over the Rhine sector. In view of more recent developments, it was decided that XXI Corps would take over a sector on the left of XV Corps.

Seventh Army on 9 January issued a directive providing that Seventh Army would regroup with XXI Corps on the left flank. The following combat troops were assigned to each Corps:

XXI Corps: 103rd Inf. Div.; 106th Cav. Gp.

XV Corps: 36th Inf. Div.; 44th Inf. Div.; 100th Inf. Div.; TF Harris (less 1 Inf. Regt.); 2d French Armored Div. (DB.)

VI Corps: 45th Inf. Div.; 79th Inf. Div.; 14th Armored Div.; 12th Armored Div.; TF Herren; TF Linden.

The new Corps became operational at 1200A, 13 January.

The XV Corps sector was rather quiet during 8 January, with the 36th and 100th Inf. Divs. making successful limited objective attacks and securing the high grounds in the vicinity of Signalberg—Spitzberg—Hochfirst. In the VI Corps, the 79th Inf. Div. continued to repulse enemy tank and infantry attacks on Maginot positions in the vicinity of Aschbach. The 21st Panzer Div. suffered heavy losses. Further to the East, CC "B" of the 12th Armored Div. counterattacked the Gamsheim pocket south from Rohrwiler, but was held up by blown bridges and made little progress. As reserves in event of an enemy breakthrough, VI Corps had the 14th Armored Div. (less one combat command) and the 12th Armored Div. (less CC "B").

Confirming verbal instructions issued previously, Sixth Army Group on 9 January issued orders directing Seventh Army to continue the defense and to organize a reserve battle position on the general line Landroff—Benestroff—Sarreunion—Ingwiller. A switch position was also to be organized along the general line of the Moder River between Ingwiller and Haguenau. Withdrawals to these positions were only to be made in face of strong enemy pressure.

With authorization from Seventh Army, XV Corps directed the 44th, 100th and 103rd Inf. Divs. to attack on 10 January to seize and hold tactically desirable terrain in preparation for a resumption of the offensive. An attack between the 44th and 100th Inf. Divs. in the vicinity of Rimling gained little ground. In the VI Corps, the 79th Inf. Div. broke up several attacks and by the end of the day was wiping out an enemy penetration in the vicinity of Hatten. On the Rhine, Seventh Army elements attacking Gamsheim reached Herrlshelm and cleared the Northern part of the town. Strong resistance was encountered throughout the entire bridgehead sector.

Strasbourg Threat Grows

The enemy drive to take Strasbourg was growing in intensity. On 10 January, First French Army troops were forced out of Gerstheim and strong contact with German infantry and armor was reported in the vicinity of Kraft—only 10 miles from Strasbourg. To the north, elements of CC "B" of the 12th Armored Div. succeeded in occupying two-thirds of Herrlisheim. A French request to the 2d French Armored Div., in XV Corps reserve West of the Vosges, for aid to relieve Strasbourg had to be refused. It was essential to keep some armor behind the Saar River line.

In view of the enemy buildup and thrust towards Strasbourg from the Colmar Pocket, Seventh Army on 11 January sent a G-3 representative to II French Corps in order to get first-hand information. The liaison officer sent back an urgent cable to the effect that II French Corps had only scanty reserves and that situation could be considered serious. A French garrison at Obenheim had been forced to capitulate and fighting was heavy around Rossfeld and Herbsheim.

The enemy in the Gambsheim bridgehead remained comparatively quiet on 11 January, although heavy artillery was received on the bridge south of Rohrwiller and Drusenheim. Small gains were made in the 45th Inf. Div. sector but heavy fighting continued in the Rittershoffen-Hatten area. Infantry and tanks were in close contact. CC "B" of the 12th Armored Div. had withdrawn to defensive positions southeast of Bischwiller after heavy fighting in Herrlisheim.

On the following day, VI Corps' position was bolstered by the Army Commander's decision to withdraw the 103d Inf. Div. from XV Corps left flank and sent it to VI Corps in place of relatively inexperienced infantry elements then in the line. Meanwhile, the 103d Inf. Div.'s old sector was to be backed up by one RCT of the 36th Inf. Div.

VI Corps' 79th Inf. Div. continued to be heavily engaged in the Hatten area with elements of 21st Panzer, 25th Panzer Grenadier, and 7th Parachute Divs., and one battalion of 47th Volksgrenadier Div. CC "A" and CC "B" of the 14th Armored Div. attacked in the Hatten area to restore Maginot positions. Below Strasbourg French garrisons of Rossfeld and Herbsheim withdrew under pressure to Hattenheim. German armor stopped a counterattack on Kraft.

In the VI Corps sector, CC "A" of the 14th Armored Div. gained control of the road between Rittershoffen and Hatten, and CC "R" attacking from the south got three companies into the west edge of Hatten, where a battalion of the 79th Inf. Div. had been isolated. The 45th Inf. Div. continued to attack against stiff resistance.

Difficulty at Gambsheim

Despite all efforts to reduce the troublesome Gambsheim bridgehead, the Germans succeeded not only in maintaining it but in reinforcing it. When it had become apparent that the Hatten-Rittershoffen effort was stalemated, the enemy transferred his attention to the Gambsheim bridgehead. Accordingly, 10th SS Panzer Div. "Frundsberg" was ferried across the Rhine into the ridgehead. On 19 January, elements of 22d SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment were identified just southeast of Rohrwiller, and the following day elements of the 21st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment appeared at Rohrwiller. Moreover, elements of the 7th Parachute Div., which were originally destined to be committed at Hatten, were re-routed East across

the Rhine and then ferried into the bridgehead. The purpose of this drive undoubtedly was to capture Strasbourg.

In order to wipe out the Gambsheim pocket, VI Corps directed the 12th Armored Div. to attack on Corps order through elements of the 79th Inf. Div. and destroy enemy forces west of the Rhine River in the Obbendorf-Herrlisheim-Drusenheim area. The attack was to be given maximum support by Corps artillery. D-Day was 16 January.

On 15 January, while the 103d Inf. Div. was moving into lines on the VI Corps front and bitter fighting continued in the Hatten area, preparations were made for the 12th Armored Div.'s attack. Sixth Army Group had authorized the Seventh Army Commander to use the 36th Inf. Div. and 12th Armored Div. as he saw fit. A plan to use the 12th Armored Div. for two days on an offensive mission was subsequently authorized.

Armored Attack Fails

Next day 12th Armored Div.'s drive made good progress initially, but resistance stiffened and all units withdrew west of the Zorn River. The First French Army's 3d Algerian Inf. Div. attacked in the vicinity of Gambsheim. House-to-house fighting continued in the Rittershoffen-Hatten area, where the 79th Inf. Div. and 14th Armored Div. were in contact with elements of three enemy divisions.

By 17 January, the Gambsheim pocket had been linked up with German forces to the north. The 12th Armored Div. continued its attack across the Zorn River, but on 18 January was forced to withdraw from Herrlisheim after heavy and bloody fighting. Sessenheim fell. Next day a battalion of the 79th Inf. Div. was surrounded at Drusenheim. Farther west, in the Bitche salient, the 45th Inf. Div. was attacking to regain contact with the isolated 3d Bn. of the 157th Inf. Regt. and other elements cut off by enemy infiltration. Not much progress was made.

Withdrawal to Moder River

Upon authority from Seventh Army, VI Corps on 20 January disengaged the enemy and commenced withdrawal to the general line Rothbach-Nieder-Modern-Haguenau-Bischwiller-Weyersheim. This shortened the 36-mile Corps front to 26 miles. A road junction one (1) kilometer northeast of Althorn was designated as limiting point between VI and XV Corps. Two battalions, the 3d Bn. of the 157th Inf. Regt. and the 2d Bn. of the 314th Inf. Regt., remained isolated and all efforts to rescue them failed, although some personnel managed to filter back through the lines.

On Sunday, 21 January, the withdrawal to the Moder River line was completed as planned except for a few minor elements. The Germans were left in thin air, and troops were disposed more favorably for Strasbourg's defense. The 36th Inf. Div. attached to VI Corps on 17 January, had now been moved into reserve positions east of the Vosges and had completed relief of the 12th Armored Div. on the Rohrwiller-Weyersheim line.

Plans For Colmar Offensive

While yielding ground temporarily in the Haguenau area, Sixth Army Group was planning to take the offensive elsewhere. On 18 January the Group issued a letter of instructions which provided for continuation of the defensive by Seventh Army while First French Army—augmented by American troops—moved to wipe out the troublesome Colmar Pocket south of Strasbourg. It was stipulated that Seventh Army would immediately turn

over to the French the 2d French Armored Div. and one additional U. S. Armored Div. VI Corps' 12th Armored Div. was the logical choice.

To cover this shift of forces, Seventh Army received within the period 16-23 January three divisions which had been deeply involved in the Ardennes fighting—the 10th Armored Div., the 101st Airborne Div. and the 35th Inf. Div. A fourth division, the 28th Inf. Div., began arriving at St. Die on 18 January and was placed under operational control of First French Army. The 75th Inf. Div. followed.

Late in the evening of 24 January, Seventh Army informed General Haislip, commanding XV Corps, that he must be prepared on short notice to take over the XXI Corps' 18-mile frontage in addition to his own. It had been learned from Sixth Army Group that XXI Corps would immediately take over a sector of the First French Army and would be placed in command of the 28th, 3d and 75th U. S. Inf. Divs. and 12th U. S. Armored Div. Seventh Army was to be responsible, of course, for administration and supply of these troops.

At 1100A the following day, control of the XXI Corps sector passed to XV Corps. Troops occupying the sector included the 106th Cavalry Group, Task Force Herren and the 10th Armored Div., less CC "B".

Enemy Repulsed on Moder

The 35th Inf. Div. began arriving in XV Corps' sector on 23 January and immediately went into the line. It was a quiet day. The three Corps rested and refitted reserve troops and maintained contact by vigorous patrol action. There was evidence of an enemy buildup in the Haguenau sector. An attack against the 79th Inf. Div. outflanked the outpost line of resistance and entered Offwiller. The 14th Armored Div. was directed by VI Corps to relieve without delay elements of the 12th Armored Div. which were maintaining a reconnaissance screen along the Corps' rear boundary from Olwisheim to Marlenheim. In the II French Corps sector, the 3d U. S. Inf. Div. was progressing in its attack south of Guemer and liberated many towns.

Next day VI Corps sustained five attacks and destroyed a number of enemy armored vehicles. The enemy had quickly followed up the withdrawal. In the 79th Inf. Div. sector, Task Force Linden's 222d Inf. Regt. was heavily attacked. The enemy crossed the Moder River in the vicinity of Neubourg after an artillery preparation. Regimental reserves had to be committed.

The Germans on 25 January continued their efforts to get across the Moder River in strength. The 103d Inf. Div. received a strong attack in the Kinswiler-Schillersdorf area, but was successful in re-establishing its MLR. In the 79th Inf. Div. sector, the enemy succeeded in capturing Schweighausen and in getting troops into Bois de Ohlungen. To take care of this situation, VI Corps released the 232d Inf. Regt. and CC "B" of the 14th Armored Div. which—without further commitment of reserves—restored all positions. The 101st Airborne Div. began movement to VI Corps sector.

On the following day, 26 January, the 103d Inf. Div. had annihilated enemy troops which had gotten into Schillersdorf, and a counterattack by the 79th Inf. Div. cleared up all enemy penetrations south of the Moder River. CC "B" of the 14th Armored Div. rejoined its parent unit in the vicinity of Wittenheim at 1545A. The German effort to cross the Moder River in the vicinity of Haguenau had apparently been discouraged.

The month of January had seen Seventh Army engaged with more enemy armor than at any other time since D-Day in Southern France. The major effort in the attack which began 1 January had been provided by two Panzer and two Panzer Grenadier Divs., with the total strength of approximately 250 tanks and self-propelled guns, and a minimum strength at any one time of 170-180. The enemy had employed his tanks in comparatively large groups of 15 to 20 in his all-out efforts to break through the Alsace position. It is estimated that his total tank losses on the Seventh Army front were about 171.

Artillery Was Effective

Nor had the German infantry come off unscathed. According to G-2 estimates based on PW interrogation, enemy losses in killed and wounded on Seventh Army's front during the period 1-25 January was about 15,000. This figure includes only infantry combat effectives. The enemy lost 4,072 PWs during the same period.

Undoubtedly, most of the German casualties were caused by artillery. Forward observers, both air and ground, had many field days. During the period 1-10 January, Seventh Army's 80-odd artillery battalions fired a daily average of 43 rounds per 105-mm howitzer, and 27 rounds per 155-mm howitzer. Counting troops attached for supply, Seventh Army expended 190,000 rounds of 105-mm and 48,000 rounds of 155-mm ammunition during the first ten days of January.

German artillery increased appreciably during the offensive, particularly at vital points, but was not comparable to the American in intensity. Several PWs from 19th Volksgrenadier Div., captured near Hahkirchen on 1 January, remarked with some bitterness that the artillery support promised for their attack had failed to materialize. They stated that their own artillery output, in comparison to the which harassed their every movement, seemed like less than one per cent.

A PW captured on 8 January near Camp de Bitche identified himself as being from the 410th Volks artillery. He said his battery had received no permission to fire its guns because there were only 6 rounds of ammunition per gun on hand. However, PWs from crack assault units such as 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div., stated that ammunition was plentiful.

Air Effective Despite Weather

Needless to say, Seventh Army's air support was of tremendous value in repelling the German offensive despite poor weather. XII Tactical Air Command, under Brig. General Gordon P. Saville, flew 1,717 sorties during the week prior to 1 January. Fighter-bombers harassed enemy troop movements behind the lines and Tac/R planes brought back vital intelligence.

Snow and fog obscured the battlefield during most of January, but XII Tac was able to deal savage blows at enemy strongholds such as Wittersheim, Erching and Bitche. The latter suffered four attacks on 4 January. Herrlisheim was attacked four times on 19 January, when 137 missions were flown in close support. All efforts were made to bring close support to front-line troops.

Enemy Air Stepped Up

The German Air Force, after two months dormancy, showed signs of coming to life on 17 December—and from that day on scarcely a day of suitable flying weather passed without report of hostile air activity. On 1 January a flight of 14 mixed types made an abortive attack on installations

Practically all enemy air activity was in the area roughly bounded by Strasbourg-Saverne-Bitche-Lauterberg. One bomb was dropped at Sarrebourg on the night of 23 December. A disconcerting trick was the employment of enemy-operated P-47s over forward areas. Approximately 52 enemy P-47 sorties occurred during the period.

Reproduced by: Hq 14 AD G-3, I + E.

okville
Interesting!
2 Thanks
Lynn

AUGUST 1986																																		
SUN					MON					TUE					WED					THUR					FRI					SAT				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30							
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30														
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30																					
24/31	25	26	27	28	29	30																												

IT IS NOT TOO EARLY TO
THINK AND PLAN = 1986=
REUNION - PORTLAND, ORE.
RED LION INN-LLOYD CENTER
1000 N. E. Multnomah

Now putting in energy thing.